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ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of seven booklets designed to introduce aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. It focuses on essential skill building and teaching activities related to early intervention in reading. The methods described of teaching reading to students with disabilities have been shown to be particularly effective. An introduction discusses general principles for teaching reading to students with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of individually designing a program based on a student's strengths and needs, parent involvement, and academic modifications. Information is organized into the following sections: what early intervention in reading is, why it is important, what parents can do, what teachers can do, information for second language learners, and resources. Strategies include asking teachers for extra reading instruction to help children with reading difficulties catch up and experience reading success before they develop negative attitudes toward reading, providing early reading intervention in addition to the child's regular reading class, providing extra phonological awareness and phonemic awareness training, providing direct instruction in phonological skills and early phonic training, and providing language development programs. (Contains 12 references.) (CR)

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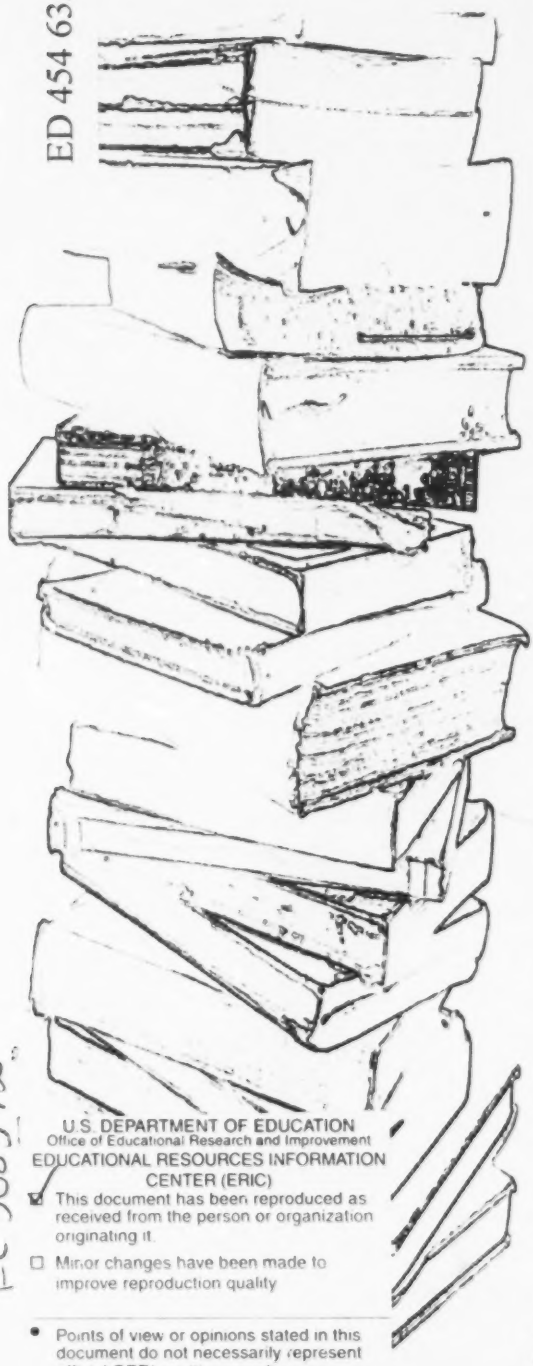

# "Early Intervention"

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# Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

by Carolyn A. Denton
Jan E. Hasbrouck
Texas A&M University

Prepared by
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September 2000

**Prepared by the PEER Project**
(Parents Engaged in Education Reform)

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**the Federation for Children with Special Needs**
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**Parents Engaged in Education Reform (PEER)** is a national technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. PEER's purpose is to support parents of children with disabilities and their organizations to be informed, active participants in education reform efforts. In addition, to enhance opportunities for early literacy in reading for at-risk students, PEER is providing information and training to parent and community organizations in promising and best practices in literacy.

**The Federation for Children with Special Needs** is a nonprofit organization based on the philosophy of parents helping parents. Founded in 1974 as a coalition of twelve disability and parent organizations, today the Federation is an independent advocacy organization committed to quality education and health care for all, and to protecting the rights of all children. To this end, the Federation provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their organizations, their professional partners, and their communities.

For more information about the PEER Project or the Federation for Children with Special Needs, please contact the Federation's Central Office at:

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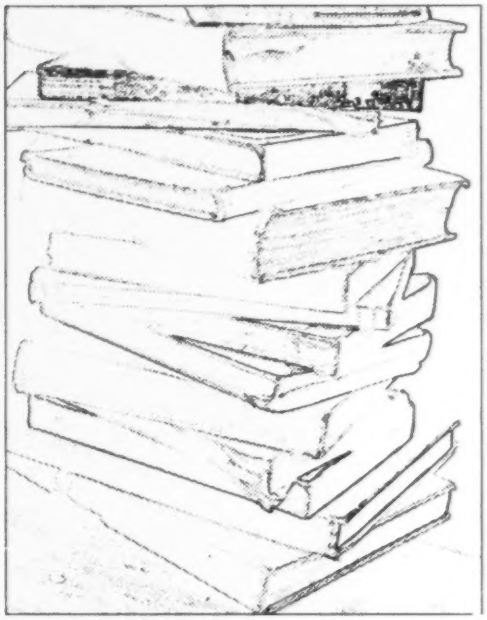
# Early Intervention



**Early Intervention** is the seventh of a seven-part series of Resource Briefs that comprises *Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read: A PEER Resource Booklet.* Titles of Resource Briefs in this series of PEER Literacy Resource Briefs include:

**Brief #1:** Phonological Awareness

**Brief #2:** Systematic Phonics Instruction

**Brief #3:** Word Identification

**Brief #4:** Supported Passage Reading

**Brief #5:** Fluent Reading

**Brief #6:** Reading Comprehension

**Brief #7:** Early Intervention in Reading

**Early Intervention** is organized into these sections:

- General principles to keep in mind
- What is it?
- Why is it important?
- What can parents do?
- What can teachers do?
- Note for second language learners
- Conclusion
- Resources
- References

## General principles to keep in mind

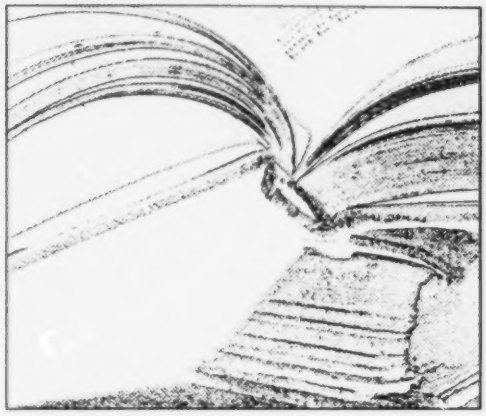
Reading is very important for success in our society, yet as many as one in five students has difficulty learning to read. Most students with learning disabilities, and many students with other types of disabilities, have problems in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling. This *Literacy Resource Brief* introduces parents and teachers to essential skill-building and teaching activities related to developing a child's phonological awareness. Methods of teaching reading to students with disabilities described here have been shown to be particularly effective. Some of these methods are used in regular education classrooms for students who are just learning to read (Kindergarten through Grade 2), but they are still relevant and useful for students with disabilities of any age who have not learned to read well. Instructional materials should be selected with an eye toward age appropriateness.

The following key issues in reading instruction for students with disabilities are important regardless of the age or ability level of a student.

- Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school. Parents have the *right* to insist that the school provide instruction designed to help their children with disabilities improve their reading skills. These issues should be addressed in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- Reading programs for students with disabilities should be individually designed based on a student's strengths and needs. Parents and teachers should not make judgments about a student's ability to learn, or about the best way to teach him or her, based solely on a student's disabling condition or label. Every individual student's abilities, needs, and life situation must be carefully evaluated and considered in the IEP in order to design the best reading program for that student.

- Many students with disabilities may need modifications (changes) in the way they receive instruction, and in the way they fulfill class requirements in order to succeed in areas such as science, social studies, and language arts. These modifications are very important, but *they should not take the place of instruction* designed to help students with disabilities improve their reading skills.



**Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school.**

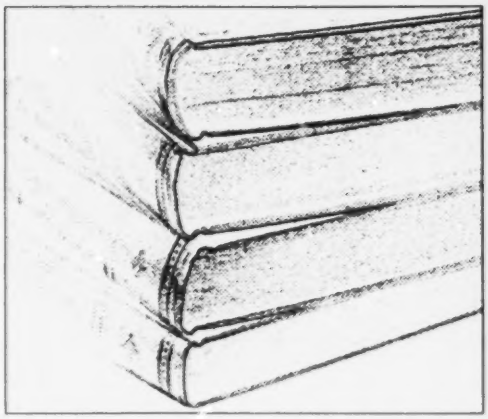
- Parents should, first and always, communicate with their child's teacher(s). Parents can simply ask their child's teacher(s) what can be done to help the child at home. Parents should also recognize themselves and be recognized as important sources of information about their child's interests, abilities, and learning styles. Coordination of school and home efforts is one of the best ways to help a student succeed. Strategies to ensure communication and coordination between school and home can be addressed in the student's IEP.

- The reading material used in reading instruction has to be "not too hard, not too easy," but at the right level for a student. Actual reading of real stories or other material should be part of a student's reading program.

- In the past, some people believed that certain methods of teaching reading were best for students with certain disabilities: that some methods were best for students with brain injury, that others were better for students with learning disabilities, and that still other methods were best for students with mental retardation. This is not the case. The success of a method of teaching reading depends on the content of the program, the way it is taught, the intensity of the instruction (how often and how actively it is taught), and the needs and strengths of the individual student.

- Although different methods of teaching reading may work equally well with students having various disabilities, students benefit when instruction is systematic and structured. Reading skills should be introduced in careful order, and students must be given a great deal of practice and repetition in each skill, so that they master each skill before new ones are introduced.

- **Note for second language learners:** Students who come to school unable to speak English should first be taught



to read in their *native language*. Later, as they gain proficiency in spoken English, they should be taught to extend these skills to reading in English. This practice, however, is not possible in all school situations. Instructional materials may not be available in the child's native language, or there may not be a teacher who can speak and read in the child's native language. If students cannot speak English, and they cannot be taught to read in their native language, they should be given time to develop their proficiency in spoken English before they begin reading instruction. They need to learn English speech sounds and vocabulary. English reading instruction should begin *after* the student can speak English well enough to benefit from instruction.

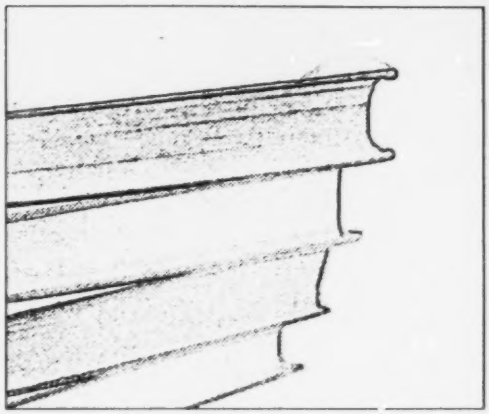
## Reference

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

## What is early intervention in reading?

Early intervention in reading means providing a special program to help young children improve their reading and writing skills before they fall behind the other students in their classes. Early intervention in reading is usually provided in Kindergarten or Grade 1 to students who show signs of having problems learning to read. These programs are normally provided to students in small groups or individually. It is important to note that this extra reading instruction and practice is provided in addition to the child's regular reading class. Students who are at-risk or who have disabilities need extra reading instruction time, not less. Early intervention programs are most effective if they are provided daily for at least 20 to 30 minutes.

There are several different types of early intervention in reading programs. One approach is to provide daily phonological awareness training to students in small groups or individually. (See **Brief #1: Phonological Awareness.**) Other approaches are described in commercially published reading programs that teachers can use in the classroom or resource room. Special programs, such as Reading Recovery, are taught by specially-trained teachers in a separate place. Some students may need special programs in language development. These language-development programs are not for second-language learners, but for children who have problems expressing themselves well in their native language.



Some of these programs may remove the child from the regular education program to receive reading instruction. Parents and teachers should make every effort to provide reading instruction within the regular classroom setting, consistent with the student's individual needs. Early intervention reading programs should be temporary, short-term interventions, not permanent placements. They should not take the place of the child's regular reading instruction, but should supplement it with additional intensive, individualized instruction designed to help the child overcome difficulties with early reading skills.

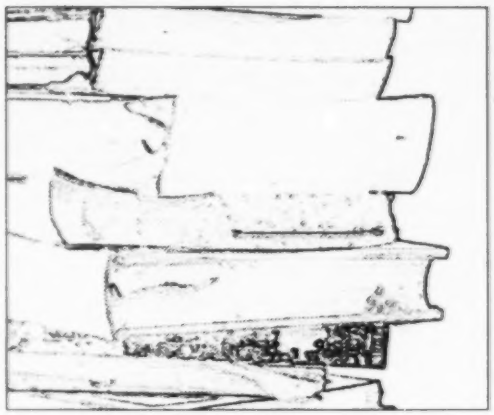
## Why is it important?

Early intervention in reading may prevent the mislabeling of some children as having learning disabilities. Research indicates that if young children are given intensive, high-quality, individualized instruction, they may catch up with other students in their grade and not need to be referred for special education services. If they do not catch up with the other students very early, even students

who do not have disabilities will tend to read less, develop a negative attitude toward reading, and become so far behind that they develop signs of reading difficulty. These students may begin to see themselves as failures, and begin to believe that they just can't learn to read. Many reading difficulties experienced by teenagers and adults could have been prevented if there had been adequate instruction in the earliest years of school.

If young children (Kindergarten through Grade 2) are receiving special education services, they can still benefit from *extra* time devoted to quality reading instruction. The sooner special remediation begins, the more likely the student can be helped. When students get further behind each year, it becomes harder for them to ever catch up to the appropriate reading level for their grade. Even if students with disabilities are provided with excellent early intervention, they may still need long-term help with their reading difficulties.

Early intervention can prevent children from feeling like failures in reading. If the instruction is of good quality, it will be individualized for each child, and each child will be successful. "Individualized" intervention means that the program will teach just what the child needs. It will be at just the right level of difficulty for that child to learn without failure—not too hard, not too easy.



**Early intervention in reading may prevent the mislabeling of some children as having learning disabilities.**

## What can parents do?

Parents of young children who are having difficulty learning to read can ask for extra reading instruction to help their children catch up and experience reading success before they develop negative attitudes toward reading. Remember, this is extra instruction provided *in addition* to the child's regular reading program, which should be provided within the regular education classroom.

## What can teachers do?

Teachers can provide early reading intervention or can request that reading specialists provide this instruction as part of an additional reading program.

***Remember:***

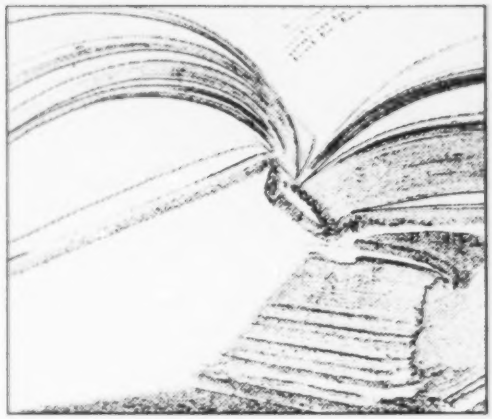
- This instruction should be provided *in addition* to the child's regular reading class.

- The intervention must be individualized for the child or group that receives it. It must be at just the right level of difficulty to teach what the child needs and to ensure learning and success.

- The intervention must be of high quality and must keep each child actively engaged in reading or reading-related activities (like phonological awareness or language development) for the entire session. There are some excellent guidelines for quality early intervention programs in the article from the *Reading Teacher* by D.L. Spiegel, listed in **References**, below.

***Teachers can provide:***

- Extra phonological awareness and phonemic awareness training (See **Brief #1: Phonological Awareness**).
- Direct instruction in phonological skills and early phonics training using programs such as *Reading Mastery* or *Read Well* (see **Resources**, below).
- Extra guided reading practice (see **Brief #4: Supported Passage Reading).**
- Language development programs, such as *Distar Language I and II* (see *Resources*, below).



**The sooner special remediation begins, the more likely the student can be helped. When students get further behind each year, it becomes harder for them to ever catch up to the appropriate reading level for their grade.**

- Other intervention programs (See, for example, "First Grade Teachers Provide Early Reading Intervention in the Classroom," listed in the **References** section, below.)

## Special Note for Second Language Learners

Early Intervention should be provided in the child's native language, if possible. The *Reading Recovery* program is available in some places in Spanish; it is known as *Descubriendo La Lectura*.

## Conclusion

With proper instruction and support, many more students than previously thought capable of reading can learn to read. Reading can open the door to success, enabling students to live fuller, more independent lives and to succeed in a variety of careers. This **PEER Literacy Resource Brief** has outlined areas of critical concern in reading education for students with disabilities. When parents and teachers have access to the information they need, they are better equipped to make decisions about students' educational programs.

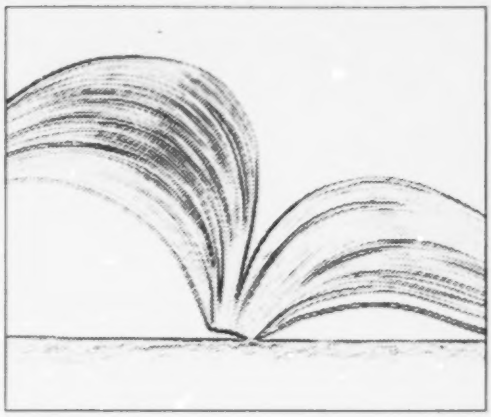
## Resources

**NOTE:** These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

### Programs Provided by the Classroom or Resource Teacher

***Distar Language I and Language II,*** SRA Publishing Co., (800) 772-4543.
***Reading Mastery,*** SRA Publishing Co., (800) 772-4543.

***Read Well: Critical Foundations in Primary Reading,*** by Sprick, Howard, and Fidanque, Sopris West, (800) 547-6747.



### Programs Provided by a Reading Specialist

***Reading Recovery and Descubriendo La Lectura:*** For more information, contact The Reading Recovery Council of North America, 1929 Kenny Road, Suite 100, Columbus, Ohio, 43210-1069, (614) 292-7111.

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